I thank the gentlewoman for yielding the time.

I want to support the comments that have been made by Members of both

sides and let Members think about it for a moment. With the exception

of Israel, the Bible, the Bible contains more references to the cities,

the regions, and the nations of ancient Iraq than any other country.

The patriarch Abraham came from the city of Ur. I actually visited the

site, when the war began, of the location of Abraham's house. Isaac's

bride, Rebekah, came from northwest Iraq. Jacob spent 20 years in Iraq,

and his sons, the 12 tribes of Israel, were born in northwest Iraq. A

remarkable spiritual revival as told in the Book of Jonah occurred in

Nineveh. The events of the Book of Esther took place in Iraq, as did

the account of Daniel in the lion's den.

So all of these religious things have taken place, and yet people

have almost forgotten about Iraq. And the previous speaker in his

comments has said the Christian community in these areas has been going

through tremendous pressure.

I have appreciated Ambassador Chris Hill's commitment to this issue.

In recent correspondence, he indicated that the security of the

Christian community remains one of his paramount concerns, especially

in light of attacks directed at Christian churches in Baghdad and Mosul

over the past 5 months.

But there needs to be leadership from the highest levels within the

State Department as well. We've long advocated both during the previous

administration and the current one that the U.S. needs to adopt a

comprehensive policy to address the unique situation of these

defenseless minorities. This resolution, and I thank both sides for

bringing it up, urges the Secretary of State to develop such a

strategy.

In closing, let me just say it is time for this administration to

start taking religious freedom seriously. The position of U.S.

Ambassador for International Religious Freedom has been vacant, has

been vacant for over a year. Did anyone hear? There is no ambassador

for religious freedom that has been appointed by this administration.

The position has been vacant, vacant for 1 year. Yet we see the

persecution of the Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Assyrian Christians

in Iraq, the Catholic Church in China, the Catholic Church in Vietnam,

on and on. So we want to see this administration have an ambassador who

can advocate, as the resolution calls for, to help Chris Hill and

helps others to speak out and advocate. But the very fact that there

has been no ambassador appointed for over 13 months kind of tells the

story. Personnel, personnel is policy, and if there's no personnel,

it's not a good policy.

Let me just end. I want to thank the gentlemen on both sides and the

gentlewoman for speaking. And I hope there's a rollcall vote on this. I

hope we have to vote up and down so we can send a message to the

Assyrian Christians and those who are going through tremendous

persecution wondering whether anybody in the West cares.